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ABSTRACT

The 5-week French Business Language and Environment Program at the Nantes Graduate School of Business is intended for overseas students of any country with at least a good intermediate level of general French language proficiency, or for language faculty wishing to acquire French business language and concepts and gain exposure to the case method of instruction. The program has three major objectives: (1) to teach advanced French business language; (2) to give a first-hand introduction to the economic and social environment of France; and (3) to give students experience in living in a French environment. Student language use and direct personal experience are emphasized. The program consists of three mandatory courses: French business language (60 hours), French social environment (21 hours), and French economic environment (24 hours). Classes are conducted 3.5 days a week, allowing an equal amount of time for travel and other external experience. To date, the program has served British and American students, but groups from other countries will soon be included. (MSE)

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FRENCH BUSINESS LANGUAGE AND ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM AT NANTES GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS (FRANCE)

by

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David Read

Paper for Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions.

Ann Arbor, Michigan, April 7-9, 1988.

French Business Language and Environment Program
at Nantes Graduate School of Business (France)

This presentation is designed to describe the objectives and content of a five-week program held for the first time in the summer of 1987 at the Nantes Graduate School of Business. It developed out of experience in two areas:

1. Summer programs for American undergraduate students on the European Economic Community, European Business and Finance, and European Social and Cultural Environment. Although courses, which have been run since 1980 are offered in the English language, there is a French language option (which replaces European Business and Finance), and this program has helped us, from an organizational point of view, to develop the French Business Language and Environment program.

2. The teaching of upper-intermediate and advanced business language in English, German and Spanish. This teaching has led the Nantes Graduate

School's language department to develop courses in problem-solving exercises and case studies within a language context and area studies with a language content.

The French Business Language and Environment Program is intended for overseas students of any country (the first group of students came from the United States and Great Britian, but students from West Germany are expected in 1988) who have at least a good intermediate level of general French language proficiency. Although no previous knowledge of business and economics is necessary, it is obviously an advantage, as it permits a quicker assimilation of the language and concepts introduced in the program, which is of upper-intermediate/early-advanced level.

The program has three major objectives:

1. Permit students to acquire and use advanced French business language.

2. Allow students to gain a first-hand introduction to the economic and social environment of France.

3. Give students direct experience of living in a French environment.

In order to attain these objectives, which require a passage from theory and practice (previous knowledge acquired in the foreign country) to direct experience (using the language and seeing it used in its environment), we have adopted the following guiding principles:

1. A pragmatic approach. Students are forced to use the language constantly.

2. Examples are used as opposed to a theoretical, more academic approach.

3. Students are asked to plunge into their immediate environment to see the language and concepts being used.

4. Students are integrated into French society as fully as possible by living in and interacting with a French family.

5. Personal experience is of the utmost importance. Visits and personal research into the immediate environment are of as much importance as classwork.

The program is composed of three courses, all mandatory - French Business Language (60 hours), French Social Environment (21 hours), French Economic Environment (24 hours).

French Business Language

This course builds on students' available language bases and provides vocabulary, structure and simplified business concepts. The five main functional areas of business - marketing and sales, finance and accounting, human resource management, international business, strategy - are covered in three stages:

1. Input. Texts (both written and audio-visual), exercises (grammar and vocabulary in situation) and small problem-solving exercises are used predominantly to introduce vocabulary and business concepts.

2. Case studies. These are designed to put into practice the knowledge acquired in the first stage. The content matter is simplified, of a limited technical nature (from a business point of view - one thinks of

the problems created for a language student faced with a full finance case) and leads to several solutions. Each student is required to make an oral presentation (in groups of two or three), including a description of the problem, an analysis of possible solutions (evaluations of the advantages and disadvantages of each) and the choice of one.

The advantages of this form of exercise are twofold. First, they are practical and down to earth, which means that students are able to use everyday language, acquired during their earlier studies and which they have confidence in, and also the recently acquired business language and concepts. Second, they are natural in the sense that students are not asked to play a role and are all working towards the same objective, the solution of the problem set out in the case.

The main disadvantage is that students are not, in many cases, used to the case-study approach nor to solving practical problems. This can lead to difficulties of organization and of expression (students are afraid to put forward their ideas simply and directly).

French Social Environment

This course covers five areas. After an historical perspective of modern France, from a social, cultural and political point of view, students cover the sociology of the country and then look at the government and institutions, the media and education. Teaching is in the form of lectures and discussions, together with a series of visits (City Hall, the Regional Assembly, the local state television station, art exhibitions, libraries and

the Chateaux of the Loire). The aim of the visits is to bring the material to life and to make the students aware of how their immediate environment fits into the overall life of the country. Students must also write a paper analysing some aspect of the social environment of France and they are encouraged to carry out their research in the local area.

French Economic Environment

The third course looks at different aspects of the French economy. Here the concept of showing examples is used to the full. After two general introductory lectures on the economy and the banking system all the other topics are dealt with through visits to companies and talks with top management -- Carrefour (distribution), Alcatel (hi-tech), CACI/World Trade Center (International Business), Port Autonome (Transportation), Nantes Chamber of Commerce (Economic Institutions). In this course, students can see the business language being used in its natural environment, can interact with French business people and can question the concepts they have learnt. All students also have to write a paper on some aspect of the French economy, with their starting point being one of the visits. This reinforces their interaction with the environment.

From the organizational point of view, classes are scheduled three and a half days each week (generally Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday morning), thus allowing students three and a half days to travel and visit other areas of France. This is consistent with the objective of allowing them to gain as much experience in their environment as possible.

This program has been designed for two types of participant. As stated above, one is the student who has a good level of French and who wants to acquire business French. It is not possible to accommodate beginners nor near beginners because of a heavy emphasis on participation at a fairly advanced level. It is preferable for beginners to participate in the Summer School in the English language, with the French language option. The second type of participant is the Professor of French, who wishes to acquire the business language and concepts, together with an introduction to teaching the case method in the language area.

In conclusion the three watchwords underlying this program are concepts which should be the basis of any business language program - acquisition, experience and participation - and concepts inherent to the teaching of any "langue vivante".

Biographical Information

Education

B.A. (Honours) University of Nottingham (UK)

French Language and Literature and Civilization

Maitrise - ES - Lettres (MA) Universite de Nantes (France)

English Literature and Civilization

Thesis on the Theatre of Harold Pinter

DEES (Doctoral degree) Universite de Nantes

Business Administration

Experience

1971-1974: Lecturer, Universite de Nantes

1974 to present: Nantes Graduate School of Business

Presently Associate Professor in Advanced Business Language

Since 1984: Director of International Programs

(Exchange programs, programs for overseas students in Nantes)

1980 - 1984: Chairman, Language Department

Extensive experience in teaching graduate students, overseas students, management development